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The Mechanics of Gassing

by Robert Faurisson

Among all those who make statements, speeches or use sentences in which the expression "gas chamber" appears, how many of those people actually know what they are talking about? It has not taken me very long to realize that many people commit one of the most glaring errors. These people imagine a "gas chamber" as being similar to a mere bedroom under the door of which a household gas is released. These people forget that an execution by gas is by definition profoundly different from a simple suicidal or accidental asphyxiation. In the case of an execution, one must carefully avoid all risk of illness, poisoning or death for the executioner and his crew. Such a risk is to be avoided before, during and after the execution. The technical difficulties implied herein are considerable. I was most anxious to know how domestic minks were gassed, how foxes were gassed in foxholes, and how in the US a person who was sentenced to death was executed by gassing. I have found that, in the vast majority of cases, hydrocyanic acid was used for such purposes. This was precisely the same gas which the Germans used to fumigate their barracks. It was also with this gas that they allegedly killed groups of individuals as well as great masses of people. I have therefore studied this gas. I wanted to know its use in Germany and in France. I have reviewed ministerial documents governing the use of this highly toxic product. I had the good fortune of discovering some documents on Zyklon B and hydrocyanic acid which had been gathered by the Allies in the German industrial archives at Nuremberg.

Then, with greater scrutiny I re-examined certain statements and confessions which had been made in German and Allied courts concerning the use of Zyklon B for putting prisoners to death, and I was shocked. And now, you in turn will also be shocked. I will first read to you the statement or confession of Rudolf Höss. Then, I will tell you the results of my research, purely physical, on hydrocyanic acid and Zyklon B. (Please bear in mind R. Höss was one of the three successive commanding officers at Auschwitz; all three of whom were detained and interrogated by the Allies. Only Höss left a confession, for which we are indebted to his Polish jailers.)

In this confession, the description of the actual gassing is remarkably short and vague. However, it is essential to realize that all those others who claim to have been present at this sort of an operation are also vague and brief and that their statements are full of contradictions on certain points. Rudolf Höss writes, "Half an hour after having released the gas, we would open the door and turn on the fan. We would immediately begin to remove the bodies." I call your attention to the word "immediately"; in German the word is "sofort." Höss then adds that the crew in charge of handling and removing 2,000 bodies from the "gas chamber" and transporting them to the crematory ovens did so while "eating or smoking"; therefore, if I understand correctly, these duties were all performed without gas masks. Such a description runs counter to all common sense. It implies that it is possible to enter an area saturated with hydrocyanic acid without taking any precautionary measures in the barehanded handling of 2,000 cyanided cadavers which were probably still contaminated with the fatal gas. The hair (which was supposedly clipped after the operation) was undoubtedly impregnated with the gas. The mucous membranes would have been impregnated also. Air pockets between the bodies which were supposedly heaped one of on top of the other would have been filled with the gas. What kind of superpowerful fan is able to instantly disperse so much gas drifting through the air and hidden in air pockets? Even if such a fan had existed, it would have been necessary to perform a test for the detection of any remaining hydrocyanic acid and to develop a procedure for informing the crew that the fan had actually fulfilled its function and that the room was safe. Now, it is abundantly clear from Höss's description that the fan in question must have been endowed with magical powers in order to be able to disperse all of the gas with such flawless performance so that there was no cause for concern or need for verification of the absence of the gas!

What mere common sense suggested is now confirmed by the technical documents concerning Zyklon B and its usage. In order to fumigate a barrack, the Germans were constrained by numerous precautionary measures: specially trained teams which were licensed only after an internship at a Zyklon B manufacturing plant; special materials including especially the "J" filters which when used in gas masks were capable of protecting an individual under the most rigorous toxic conditions; evacuations of all surrounding barracks; warnings posted in several languages and bearing a skull and cross-bones; a meticulous examination of the site to be fumigated in order to locate and seal any fissures or openings; the sealing of any chimneys or airshafts and the removal of keys from doors. The cans of Zyklon B were opened at the site itself. After the gas had apparently killed all the vermin, the most critical operation would begin: this was the ventilation of the site. Sentries were to be stationed at a certain distance from all doors and windows, their backs to the wind, in order to prevent the approach of all persons. The specially trained crew equipped with gas masks would then enter the building and unplug the chimneys and cracks, and open the windows. This operation completed, they had to go outside again, remove their masks and breathe freely for ten minutes. They had to put their masks on again to re-enter the building and perform the next step. Once all of this work was completed, it was still necessary to wait TWENTY hours. Actually, because Zyklon B was "difficult to ventilate, since it adheres strongly to surfaces," the dispersion of the gas required a long natural ventilation. This was especially important when great volumes of the gas were employed as in the case of a barrack containing more than one floor. (When Zyklon B was used in an autoclave with a total volume of only 10 cubic meters, ventilation (forced or artificially) was still necessary.) After twenty hours had elapsed, the crew would return with their masks on. They would then verify by means of a paper test (the paper would turn blue in the presence of hydrocyanic acid) as to whether or not the site was indeed again fit for human habitation. And so we see that a site which had been gassed was not safely accessible until a minimum of 21 hours had elapsed. As far as French legislation is concerned, the minimum is set at 24 hours.

It becomes, therefore, apparent that in the absence of a magical fan capable of instantly expelling a gas that is "difficult to ventilate, since it adheres strongly to surfaces," the "human slaughterhouse" called a "gas chamber" would have been inaccessible for nearly a full day. Its walls, floors, ceiling would have retained portions of a gas which was highly poisonous to man. And what about the bodies? These cadavers could have been nothing less than saturated with the gas, just as the cushions, mattresses and blankets discussed in the same technical document on the use of Zyklon B would have been saturated also. These mattresses, etc., had to be taken out of doors to be aired and beaten for an hour under dry atmospheric conditions and for two hours when the weather was humid. When this was accomplished, these items were then heaped together and beaten again if the paper test revealed any further presence of hydrocyanic acid.

Hydrocyanic acid is both inflammable and explosive. How could it then have been used in close proximity to the entrance of crematory ovens? How could one have entered the "gas chamber" while smoking?

I have not yet even touched upon the subject of the superabundance of technical and physical impossibilities which become apparent upon an actual examination of the site and the dimensions of the supposed "gas chambers" at Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Moreover, just as an inquisitive fact-finder of the Polish museum may discover, these chambers were in reality nothing more than "cold storage rooms" (mortuaries) and were typical of such rooms both in lay-out as well as size. The supposed "gas chamber" of Krema II at Birkenau, of which there remains only a ruin, was in fact a morgue, located below ground in order to protect it from heat and measuring 30 meters in length and 7 meters in width (two meters on either side for cadavers and 3 meters down the centre to allow for the movement of wagons). The door, the passageways, the freight lift (which measured only 2.10 meters by 1.35 meters) which led to the crematory chamber were all of Lilliputian dimensions in comparison to the insinuations of Höss's account. According to Höss, the gas chamber could easily accommodate 2,000 standing victims, but had a capacity of 3,000. Can you imagine that? Three thousand people crammed into a space of 210 square meters. In other words, to make a comparison, 286 people standing in a room measuring 5 meters by 4 meters! Do not be deceived into believing that before their retreat the Germans blew up the "gas chambers" and crematory ovens to conceal any trace of their alleged crimes. If one wishes to obliterate all trace of an installation which would be intrinsically quite sophisticated, it must be scrupulously dismantled from top to bottom so that there remains not one shred of incriminating evidence. Destruction by means of demolition would have been ingenuous [meaning "naive", testified Faurisson]. If explosives had been employed, mere removal of the concrete blocks would still have left this or that telltale sign. As a matter of fact, Poles of the present day Auschwitz museum have reconstructed the remains of some "Kremas" (meaning, in reality, reconstructions of crematoria and supposed "gas chamber"). However, all of the artifacts shown to tourists attest to the existence of crematory ovens rather than to anything else.

The real gas chambers, such as those created in 1924 and developed by the Americans around 1936- 1938 offer some idea of the inherent complexity of such a method of execution. The Americans, for one thing, only gas one prisoner at a time normally (some gas chambers exist, however, which are equipped with two seats for the execution of two brothers, for example). The prisoner is totally immobilized. He is poisoned by the hydrocyanic acid (actually by the dropping of sodium cyanide pellets into a container of sulfuric acid and distilled water which results in release of hydrocyanic acid gas). Within approximately 40 seconds, the prisoner dozes off, and in a few minutes he dies. Apparently, the gas causes no discomfort. As in the case of Zyklon B, it is the dispersion of the gas which causes problems. Natural ventilation for 24 hours is not possible in this case. Obviously, the location of the site of execution precludes such ventilation without seriously endangering the guards as well as other prison inmates. What, then, is the best course of action with a gas which poses such difficult problems of ventilation? The solution is to transform the acidic vapors into a solid salt which can then be flushed out with water. For this purpose, ammonia vapors which are basic are used to react with the acid vapors to form the salt by chemical reaction. When the hydrocyanic acid has all but vanished, a warning signal would alert the attending physician and his aides who are located on the opposite side of a glass barrier. The warning signal is phenolphthalein. It is arranged in containers located at various places in the chamber and turns from pink to purple in the absence of hydrocyanic acid. Once the absence of the poison is indicated and once an arrangement of fans draws the ammonia fumes out through an exhaust vent, the physician and his assistants enter the chamber wearing gas masks. Rubber gloves are used to protect the hands. The doctor ruffles through the convict's hair so as to brush out any residual hydrocyanic acid. Only after a full hour has elapsed may a guard enter the chamber. The convict's body is then washed very carefully and the room is hosed down. The ammonia gas has by this time been expelled via a high chimney stack above the prison. Because of the danger to guards who are normally stationed in the prison watch towers, in some prisons the guards are required to leave their post during such an execution. I will just mention the other requirements for a completely air-tight gas chamber such as the need for locks, "Herculite" glass barriers of considerable thickness (because of the risk of implosion since a vacuum has to be made), a vacuum system, mercury valves, etc.

A gassing is not an improvisation. If the Germans had decided to gas millions of people, a complete overhaul of some very formidable machinery would have been absolutely essential. A general order, instructions, studies, commands and plans would surely have been necessary also. Such items have never been found. Meetings of experts would have been necessary: of architects, chemists, doctors, and experts in a wide range of technical fields. Disbursements and allocations of funds would have been necessary. Had this occurred in a state such as the Third Reich, a wealth of evidence would surely have survived. We know, for example, down to the pfennig, the cost of the kennel at Auschwitz and of the bay trees which were ordered for the nurseries. Orders for projects would have been issued. Civilian workers and engineers would not have been permitted to mingle with the inmates. Passes would not have been granted to Germans in the camp, and their family members would not have had visiting rights. Above all, the prisoners who had served their sentences would not have been released and permitted to return to their respective countries: that well guarded secret among historians was revealed to us several years ago in an article by Louis De Jong, Director of the Institute of World War II History of Amsterdam. Moreover, in the United States the recent publication of aerial photographs of Auschwitz deals a death blow to the extermination fable: even in the summer of 1944 at the height of the influx of Hungarian Jews, there is no indication of any human pyre or throng of prisoners near the crematorium (but an open gate and a landscaped area are clearly visible) and there is no suspicious smoke (although the smoke stacks of the crematoria reportedly spewed forth and flames continuously that were visible from a distance of several kilometers both day and night).

I will conclude with a comment on what I regard as the criterion of false evidence regarding the gas chambers. I have noticed that all of

these statements, vague and inconsistent as they are, concur on at least one point: the crew responsible for removing the bodies from the "Gas chamber" entered the site either "immediately" or a "few moments" after the deaths of the victims. I contend that this point alone constitutes the cornerstone of the false evidence, because this is a physical impossibility. If you encounter a person who believes in the existence of the "gas chambers," ask him how, in his opinion, the thousands of cadavers were removed to make room for the next batch. Note: Due to the pressure of time, we regret that Dr. Faurisson's article is published here without footnotes or references. This was because Dr. Faurisson wishes both the references and their translation to be scrupulously accurate. The references and notes will be published at a later date. Readers who wish to study the U.S. prison "Gas Chamber Procedure Check Sheet" should refer to *The Spotlight* newspaper (300 Independence Avenue., South-East, Washington, D.C. 20003) of 24 December 1979.

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